2: Meyer--180 K-5 (1911) 1916 FO42 Rundi FO42

[117] Chapter 9

Religion, Myths, Cults, Missions

1. Gods

771 The religion of the Barundi is probably best described as animism and totemism, with a generous admixture of elements of fetishism (talisman), manism (worship of the ancestral spirits), and hero cult. The last has already become a cult of gods in many respects. This mixture of elements of the "totemistic era" with those of the "era of heroes and gods" (No. 43, pp. 116, 278) is undoubtedly the result of the mixture of the indigenous Batwa and Bantu with the Hamitic conquerors who added their totemistic clan organization and the cult of their heroes -- who have become tribal gods -- to the clan system, animism, and fetishism of the Batwa and Bantu. All these different social and religious elements have permeated each other, partly by merely existing side by side, partly by merging together and changing, so that it is often difficult to separate out neatly the individual elements and to recognize their origin.

Animism and the belief in demons constitute the main body of the religious concepts of the Barundi. These beliefs are shared by Batwa, Bahutu, and also the Batussi, although the latter to a much smaller extent. Apparently in Urundi as well as in all the rest of the interlacustrine region the Bahima brought with them more refined religious ideas from their original homes in the north. These ideas partly repressed the crude belief in demons and sorcery held by the Bantu Negroes and gave a more important role to ancestor worship. It is true, however, that the large majority of the Bahutu still cling to the old primitive belief in demons and sorcery which conforms so well to their spiritual bent. The Barundi believe that everything is endowed with a soul. As among most primitive peoples who are still at the stage of animism, their ideas of an immaterial soul are based on the observed fact that in a sleeping body there exists

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774 something which is alive, which does not rest but thinks, sees,
787 and moves about. In a dream this incorporeal part of us sees the world not merely as a person who is awake does, but it also meets the dead who thus continue to exist incorporeally after death. If this immaterial element, the life-generating soul, permanently leaves the body, the human being dies.

774 The distinction between the body or shadow soul and the breath soul which W. Wundt and C. Meinhof considered characteristic of totemistic conceptions (No. 43, p. 203; No. 41, pp. 32-34) apparently fits [118] the notions of the Barundi, for the Murundi clearly distinguishes between the spirit of a dead person, the umusimu, and the soul active within a living person, the umutima, which is destroyed at the moment of death along with the pulsating heart, the indihagusi (No. 46, p. 15). It further seems certain to me that the Barundi conceive of all things, organic or inorganic, as being endowed with souls; this does not only apply to persons and animals but also to plants, stones, stars, fire, fountains, rivers, etc. These are not simply regarded as the occasional residences of former human and animal souls but as having souls of their own. Thus, the thorny bush which scratches the hunter and makes him bleed does so not only because it is the abode of what formerly was a malicious human soul but because it has a malicious "bush soul" of its own. The fountain refreshes the thirsty traveler not because, or not only because in it resides the spirit of what was formerly a generous person but because it has its own generous "fountain soul."

775 Umusimu is not only the term for the spirit of the deceased but also for the object or the animal which the spirit of the deceased has chosen as its residence; there may be various ones. Frequently these are small oblong pebbles (inguru) from the fields of the deceased. These pebbles are collected by the next of kin and put into a wooden trough which is placed inside the sacrificial hut where a beer sacrifice is made to them (No. 46, p. 16). Often the soul of a dead person also resides in an object close to his former dwelling, in a tree, fence, or rock, often also in an animal which by its nimble

4: Maquet E-5 (1950-1951) 1954 FO42 Rundi FO42

other hand, got it by his sobriety and cleverness. Kazikamuntu then chose Gatutsi to be the chief of the brothers. There are numerous versions of this tale. Moreover, the stories concerning man's creation are often inextricably mixed with the legends about the arrival of the Batutsi in Ruanda. The same names appear sometimes in the creation, sometimes in the conquest stories. In general the latter are better known. The summary given above is thus only one of the various accounts of the origin of mankind.

According to a widely known folk-tale, Death, personalized as a sort of animal, was hunted by *Imana*. He told all men to stay at home in order that Death should not find a hiding-place. An old woman, however, went out to work in her banana-grove. Death, pursued by *Imana*, asked her protection. Moved by pity, she let the animal hide under her skirt. *Imana*, in order to punish her, decided then that death should stay with men. This story might perhaps suggest a belief that there was a time when men did not die. But we could not find other elements to corroborate that interpretation.

On the ontological character of man two points are certain. First, an adult human being is considered to be different from an animal by virtue of his faculty of speech (*kivuga*), his intelligence (*ubwenge*), and his will (*ugushaka*); but the difference, if any, between a small child and an animal is not quite clear. Second, no one of these attributes is equated with the surviving spirit (*muzimu*). There is something in the human being which, after his death, becomes *muzimu*, but there is no agreement as to what it is. According to a fairly common opinion, the *muzimu* is the metamorphosis of the *igicucu*, the shadow cast by the body in sunshine. But according to some informants, this shadow is only an image of the spiritual shadow which is the essence of the post-mortem spirit. In conformity with that opinion, the living man is said to be made of three components: the body (*mubili*) which, after death, becomes a corpse (*murambo*); life (*buzima*), which disappears; and the shadow (*igucucu*) from which the surviving spirit (*muzimu*) results.

The heart is believed to be the seat of intelligence and affectivity. It is conceived as a single organ although some ways of speaking suggest that it is double. For instance, it is frequently said: 'One heart told me this, one heart told me that.' This is another application of the habit of attributing opposed effects of the same cause to several causes, but this is only a verbal habit which does not deceive anybody.

These uncertainties regarding the nature of man indicate that Banyarwanda do not make any clear-cut distinction between the concepts of body and mind. Although they recognize parts in man, they prefer to consider the unit rather than its components.

Whatever the culture, human experience is made up of a sequence of events and activities, such as working, eating, sleeping, maturing, suffering, mating, getting old, and dying. What is the Ruanda attitude in face of these universals of human life? In many societies these happenings are considered not in their naked reality but in terms of the beliefs held as true in the particular culture. For instance, in a society with a Christian ideology, to